CIRCULAR LETTER

FROM THE

Elders *and* Meſſengers

OF THE

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Aulceſter*, *Bengeworth*, *Bewdley*, *Birmingham*, *Bourton*, *Bromſgrove*, *Hook-Norton*, *Leominſter*, *Middleton*, *Perſhore*, *Sutton*, *Tewkeſbury*, *Upton*, *Warwick*, and *Worceſter*, (having received Letters alſo from *Dudley*, and *Bridgenorth*,) met in ASSOCIATION at *Aulceſter*, May the 21ſt and 22d, 1771; and holding the Doctrines of *Three equal Perſons in the Godhead*; *eternal* and *perſonal Election*; *original Sin*; *particular Redemption*; *free Juſtification by the imputed Righteouſneſs of* CHRIST; *efficacious Grace in Regeneration*; and *the final Perſeverance of the Saints*.

To the Churches they repreſent; wiſhing Grace and Peace may be multiplied, through the Knowledge of GOD, and our *Saviour* JESUS CHRIST.

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THE

CIRCULAR LETTER.

Dear Brethren,

IT behoveth us to acknowledge, with unfeigned Gratitude of Heart, the many Bleſſings which our Heavenly Father hath beſtowed upon us, and by which we this day ſtand diſtinguiſhed from moſt other People on the face of the earth. It is now almoſt an age ſince religious Liberty was firſt eſtabliſhed in this Kingdom, and Diſſenters from the national Church, not only exempted from the Penalties to which they were before liable, but ſecured in the public Exerciſe of their Religion under the Sanction of the Laws, and the Protection of the Civil Magiſtrate. Since this happy Period many unreaſonable Prejudices have ſubſided, and the eyes of the People, in general, have been ſo far opened as to ſee the Reaſonableneſs of that Security which we now enjoy. And of late, indeed, it has been almoſt univerſally acknowledged, that to perſecute any Man for Conſcience ſake is equally cruel, impolitic, and unchriſtian. But it is to be feared, that, while we have thus gained in outward Liberty and Reſpect, we have loſt much in the inward Power of primitive and genuine Piety.——Certain it is that we have not rendered to our GOD according to the Benefits beſtowed upon us, nor made thoſe Improvements that might have been expected. No: We may well be aſhamed to compare the Temper of our Hearts, and the Conduct of our Lives with thoſe who lived in times leſs favourable

to religious Liberty, and who ſought, indeed, the Bread of their Souls, in the conſtant Peril of Perſecution, Impriſonment, and Death. We have not improved our Privileges; but yet we ſhould value them, and be thankful for them. It is no ſmall Mercy, that we can ſit under our Vines and Fig-trees; that we can enjoy our public and ſolemn Aſſemblies, and there is none to interrupt us, or to make us afraid. Man was formed for Society, and cannot be happy without it. *Solomon* ſays, "*As Iron ſharpeneth Iron, ſo a Man ſharpeneth the* "*Countenance of his Friend.*" But, of all others, religious Society and Intercourſe is the moſt pleaſant and delightful. Dear Brethren, we cannot but hope, that the Society we have now had together, in the things of God, has been not only pleaſant, but profitable to our Souls; that GOD has been with us, and that it was good for us to be here. And, for the Love we have to your Souls, we would, if poſſible, transfuſe into your Hearts ſomething of what we have felt on this Occaſion.

Your Letters we read in the Aſſembly; and we ſhould have been wanting to ourſelves, and to you, not to have been affected with their ſeveral contents. Many Complaints of Carnality, of Backſliding, of Coldneſs, of Indifference, of Deadneſs in the things of GOD, have been laid before us as uſual; but whether thoſe various Complaints were made with that Compunction and Sorrow of Heart, which they require, we muſt leave to your own Conſciences to determine. Be this as it will, we have too much reaſon to fear, that, in fact, theſe Complaints have not been at all exaggerated. No: There is all that Carnality, all that Earthly-mindedneſs, all that Indifferency, and Deadneſs in the things of GOD,

which you complain of, to be found amongſt you. We therefore intreat you to enquire into the real Cauſe of theſe Complaints. You are not ſtraitened in God, in his Word and Ordinances: No; you are ſtraitened in yourſelves; the Cauſe lies deep in your own Hearts; be ſollicitous to find it out; beg of GOD not only to find it out and ſhew it to you, but to remove it by the powerful and enlivening Operations of his Holy Spirit. It is a ſad thing to complain year after year, and yet never to be ſollicitous, never to apply in good earneſt to GOD and his Grace, to have your Complaints removed: This is Deceit, this is Hypocriſy with a witneſs: We hope therefore you will not dare to indulge it any longer.

On the other hand, there are ſome things in the Letters before us of a different Complexion; ſome things which give us good hope, bad as it is, that GOD hath not yet wholly forſaken you. Peace and Harmony have been in a good meaſure reſtored in ſome of the Churches, where it had been long and much wanted. The means of Grace, the Ordinances of GOD's Houſe, as well attended as uſual; and, notwithſtanding the many awful Breaches that have been made of late, there is but one ſmall Congregation within the compaſs of this Aſſociation deſtitute of a Miniſter. In moſt of the Churches there has been ſome addition of Members; and, on the whole, you will find the Increaſe nearly double the number loſt by Death; and, what is ſtill more, with this Increaſe of number, there has been, we have reaſon to hope, *ſome* Revival at leaſt of the Power and Life of Religion. Theſe things, and others of the like nature, could not but rejoice our Hearts, and fill our Lips with the high praiſes

of

of our GOD in the ſolemn Aſſembly.

And now what ſhall we ſay to you? we deſpair of offering any thing new; nor need we be ſollicitous about it. The grand Arguments we have to offer have been often urged; but yet their Importance is ſuch, that they may ſtill be urged with Advantage: And, if ſet home by the Spirit of GOD, we know they will be effectual to ſtir up your Souls and ours, to lead us into the true Spirit, and fix our Attention to the important Duties of our holy Religion.

We charge you therefore, by the Truths, the important and precious Truths of the everlaſting Goſpel; by the Concern you ought to have for the Glory of GOD, and the good of your Souls; by the ſolemn and public Profeſſion you have made of the Chriſtian Religion; by the Love of GOD to a ſinful World in the Gift of his Son; by the Incarnation, Obedience, Sufferings and Death of the LORD JESUS CHRIST; by the Hope you have of an Intereſt in Redemption by his Blood; by his triumphant Reſurrection from the Dead; by his glorious, certain, and ſpeedy Appearance to Judgment; by all the Miſeries of Hell, and by all the Joys of Heaven; and by every other awful and tremendous Conſideration that can be ſuggeſted to your Thoughts, we charge you, this day, to ſuffer the Word of Exhortation, and attend to the few plain, but important Admonitions we now give you.

Guard againſt Sin, all the Appearances of it, every thing that leads to it. Shun it as the moſt peſtilential Evil, worſe than the Plague to your Bodies; Death, Miſery and Perdition to your Souls. —— Cultivate real Holineſs, the oppoſite to Sin:

Deſire

Desire and Endeavour to be like GOD: Put off the old Man with his Deeds yet more and more, and put on the new Man, which after GOD is created in Righteousness and true Holiness; for this is Health, Life, and Happiness, and you cannot see GOD without it. Attend to the Duties of Religion; keep up uninterrupted Communion and Intercourse with GOD in Reading his Word, in Meditation, in Prayer, in the Closet in the Family, and in the House of GOD.—Keep his holy Sabbaths; wait daily at the Posts of his Door; fill up your Places at all times in the solemn and public Assembly, and especially at the Table of *your* LORD. — Be not contented with the outward Appearance, with mere bodily Exercise, which profiteth little, but above all things desire to enter into the true Spirit of Religion. — Love GOD, love CHRIST, put your whole Trust in him, and cleave to him with full purpose of Heart; and love one another for his sake. Let Charity, Love to GOD and to your Neighbour have its proper work: keep the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace, and, as you would have the GOD of Love and the GOD of Peace to be with you, live in Love, in perfect Love and Peace with each other.—— Live upon GOD every day of your Life, and live to him.——Let the Interest of Religion, the Glory of GOD, the Glory of CHRIST lie near your Hearts, and then you will do all you can to promote it.

Dear Brethren, we are assured it is not more your Duty than it is your Interest to attend to these things; and had we any doubt of this, or had we less Love to your Souls, we might be less pressing and passionate in our Address to you on this Occa-

sion

ſion. But you know, you profeſs to know, that a due Attention to Religion, and the true Spirit and Power of it on your Heart is the only thing that can make you happy: And we likewiſe hope, that you have ſo far a good Opinion of us, as to believe that we have no other View, in what we now ſay, than your real Good. Yes; We can truly ſay, that we can have no greater Pleaſure, no greater Joy than to ſee you what you ought to be, lively, warm, growing, and exemplary Chriſtians. "*For* "*what is our Hope, or Joy, or Crown of Rejoicing?* "*Are not even ye in the Preſence of our* LORD "JESUS CHRIST at his coming. *For ye are* "*our Glory and Joy!*". As ſuch we once more "*commend you to God, and to the Word of his* "*Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give* "*you an Inheritance among all them which are ſancti-*"*fied,*"

And remain your affectionate Brethren, and Servants for JESUS' ſake.

Signed, the 22d of *May*, in the Name of the Aſſembly, by the Moderator,

BENJ. BEDDOME.

It was deſired by ſeveral of the Brethren, that, in the Poſtcript of the Letter, public and private Faſts might be recommended, to be attended to as the Circumſtances of the ſeveral Churches, and the particular Members of each may require.——That Deacons be exhorted to exert themſelves with Diligence and Activity in Diſcharge of their Office. ——That Praying Members be more free to exerciſe the Gift that is in them, when called upon for that Purpoſe, which is not only their Privilege, but their indiſpenſable Duty.——And that real Converts, or thoſe who have taſted of the Grace of GOD in Truth, ſhould make Conſcience of entering into Church Fellowſhip, and of teſtifying their Obedience and Love to CHRIST by an immediate Attendance to the Ordinances of Baptiſm and the Lord's Supper.

BRE-

On *Tueſday* Evening, the Meſſengers being met, ſome little time as uſual was improved in Prayer; our Brother *B. Beddome* choſen Moderator; the Letters read; the State of the aſſociated Churches repreſented in them conſidered; and the Meeting concluded in Prayer.

The Morning Meeting on *Wedneſday* was improved in Prayer, and ſettling the State of the Churches. At 10 o'Clock Brother *Beddome* opened the public Service: Brother *Hillier* followed in Prayer: Brother *Thomas* preached from *Eph.* iv. 5. *One Faith*,——. And Brother *Turner* concluded in Prayer.

At 2 o'Clock Brother *Aſh* opened the public Meeting with Singing and Prayer: Brother *Poynting* preached from *Acts* xvi. 17. *Theſe Men are the Servants of the moſt High God, who ſhew unto us the Way of Salvation.* And Brother *Mac Gowan* concluded in Prayer.

The ſame Evening, the Circular Letter was read, approved by the Aſſembly, and ſigned by the Moderator: And Brother *John Butterworth* concluded the whole in Prayer.

Baptized in the ſeveral Churches ——		28
Dead —— ——	15	
Excluded —— ——	1	
	——	16
Total Increaſe —— ——		12

The next Aſſociation to be at *Leominſter*: Brother *Turner* and Brother *Skinner* to preach; in Caſe of Failure, Brother *Hillier*.

Put up at the *Three Horſe-Shoes*.

FINI

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